

Mini Research Assignment Mentor Text

During the 1950s, the United States government adopted policies that had the intent of assimilating Native Americans into mainstream society by ending federal recognition of and supervision of tribes. The first main tool of termination was the actual termination of tribes. During this era, over 100 tribes were terminated, and over 3 million acres of tribal land nationwide were relinquished. Another tool of termination was Public Law 280, which extended state jurisdiction, or the authority to enforce law, into Indian country. Prior to this law, these matters were handled by tribal and/or federal law enforcement. PL 280 did not take jurisdiction *away* from tribes; rather, in the states where this law still applies, both states and tribes share jurisdiction, which has led to significant legal confusion and jurisdiction disputes. Finally, the third tool of termination was the Bureau of Indian Affairs' relocation program, aimed at getting Native Americans off reservations and to cities like Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Oakland. For many Native Americans, relocation to cities resulted in the loss of access to traditional cultural supports, economic hardship, social disenfranchisement, discrimination, and unemployment. In the 1970s, President Richard Nixon worked to end and reverse these termination policies. When he was a student at Whittier College, Nixon met one of his most influential mentors, his football coach, Wallace Newman, a Luiseño Indian. Nixon's relationship with Newman shaped his later policies, in which he advocated strongly for Indian self-determination. Notably, he was the first president to give back Native land in over 200 years.

Understanding termination and relocation policies is essential for grasping the Urban Indian identity that Orange explores in his novel. Orange's characters are from and/or currently live in the city of Oakland, a consequence of federal policies that encouraged or forced Native people to relocate to urban areas. Orange reveals that this history has led to an incomplete or

fractured understanding of their identity for some Native people. For example, Edwin has grown up disconnected from his Native heritage, not knowing his father and not even knowing the tribe he is from. As a result, Edwin has spent his life searching for a connection to his Native identity, studying Native American literature, and finally finding and reaching out to his father, Harvey, on the Internet. Despite this, he still feels like he's "Not Native enough" (72). Through Edwin's identity crisis, Orange conveys how federal policies from generations ago continue to have an impact on Native people today as they navigate their Native identity in an urban environment.

Works Cited

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